

North of Fifty-Three

By BERTRAND W. SINCLAIR

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HAZEL FINDS SHE CANNOT HOPE TO ESCAPE FROM "ROARING BILL'S" CABIN IN THE WILDERNESS BEFORE SPRING

Synopsis.—Miss Hazel Weir is employed as a stenographer in the office of Harrington & Bush at Granville, Ontario. She is engaged to Jack Barrow, a young real estate agent. Mr. Bush, Hazel's employer, suddenly notices her attractiveness and at once makes her his private stenographer. After three months Bush proposes marriage. Hazel refuses, and after a stormy scene, in which Bush warns her he will make her sorry for her action, Hazel leaves the office, never to return. Shortly after this Bush is thrown from his horse and killed. Publication of his will discloses that he left Hazel \$5,000 in "reparation for any wrong I may have done her." Jack Barrow, in a jealous rage, demands an explanation, and Hazel, her pride hurt, refuses. Hazel's engagement is broken and, to escape from her surroundings, she secures a position as schoolteacher at Cariboo Meadows, in a wild part of British Columbia. There, at a boarding house, she first sees "Roaring Bill" Wagstaff, a well-known character of that country. Soon after her arrival Hazel loses her way while walking in the woods. She wanders until night when she reaches "Roaring Bill's" camp fire in the woods. He promises to take her home in the morning, but she is compelled to spend the night in the woods. After wandering in the woods all the next day, "Roaring Bill" finally admits that he is taking Hazel to his cabin in the mountains.

CHAPTER V.—Continued.

"Anyhow," he went on, when she remained silent, "I didn't. And you'll have to lay the blame on nature for making you a wonderfully attractive woman. I did honestly try to find the way to Cariboo Meadows that first night. It was only when I found myself thinking how fine it would be to hike through these old woods and mountains with a partner like you that I decided—as I did. I'm human—the woman, she tempted me. And aren't you better off? Do you know that you look fifty per cent better for these few days of living in the open—the way every normal being likes to live? You're getting some color in your cheeks, and you're losing that worried, archangel look. Honest, if I were a physician, I'd have only one prescription: Get out into the wild country, and live off the country as your primitive forefathers did. Of course, you can't do that alone. I know because I've tried it. We humans don't differ so greatly from the other animals. We're made to hunt in couples or packs. There's a purpose, a law, you might say, behind that, too; only it's terribly obscured by a lot of other non-essentials in this day and age."

But she would not take up the cudgels against him, would not seem to countenance or condone his offense by discussing it from any angle whatsoever. And she was more determined to allow no degree of friendliness, even in conversation, because she recognized the masterful quality of the man.

After a lapse of time they dropped into another valley, and faced westward to a mountain range which Bill told her was the Rockies. The next day a snowstorm struck them. It was not particularly cold. Bill wrapped her in a heavy canvas coat, and plodded on. Noon passed, and he made no stop. If anything, he increased his pace.

Suddenly, in the late afternoon, they stepped out of the timber into a little clearing, in which the blurred outline of a cabin showed under the wide arms of a leafless tree.

The melting snow had soaked through the coat; her feet were wet with the clinging flakes, and the chill of a lowering temperature had set Hazel shivering.

Roaring Bill halted at the door and lifted her down from Silk's back without the formality of asking her leave. He pulled the latchstring, and led her in. Beside the rude stone fireplace wood and kindling were piled in readiness for use. Bill kicked the door shut, dropped on his knees and started the fire. In five minutes a great blaze leaped and crackled into the wide throat of the chimney. Then he piled on more wood, and turned to her.

"This is the house that Jack built," he said, with a sober face and a twinkle in his gray eyes. "This is the man that lives in the house that Jack built. And this"—he pointed mischievously at her—"is the woman who's going to love the man that lives in the house that Jack built."

"That's a lie!" she flashed stormily through her chattering teeth.

"Well, we'll see," he answered cheerfully. "Get up here close to the fire and take off those wet things while I put away the boots."

And with that he went out whistling.

CHAPTER VI.

A Little Personal History.

Hazel discarded the wet coat, and, drawing a chair up to the fire, took off her sopping footgear and toasted her bare feet at the blaze. Her clothing was also wet, and she wondered pettishly how in the world she was going to manage with only the garments on her back—and those dirty and torn from hacking through the brush for a matter of two weeks. According to her standards, that was roughing it with a vengeance. But presently she gave over thinking of her plight. The fire warmed her, and, with

the chill gone from her body, she bestowed a curious glance on her surroundings.

There was furniture of a sort unknown to her, tables and chairs fashioned by hand with infinite labor and rude skill, massive in structure; upholstered with the skins of wild beasts common to the region. Upon the walls hung pictures, dainty black-and-white prints, and a water color or two. And between the pictures were nailed heads of mountain sheep and goat, the antlers of deer and caribou. Above the fireplace spread the huge shovel horns of a moose, bearing across the prongs a shotgun and fishing rods. The center of the floor—itsself, as she could see, of hand-smoothed logs—was lightened with a great black and red and yellow rug of curious weave. Covering up the bare surface surrounding it were bearskins, black and brown. Her feet rested in the fur of a monster silver-tip, fur thicker and softer than the pile of any carpet ever fabricated by man. All around the walls ran shelves filled with books. A guitar stood in one corner, a mandolin in another.

Except for the dust that had gathered lightly in its owner's absence, the place was as neat and clean as if the housemaid had but gone over it. Hazel shrugged her shoulders. Roaring Bill Wagstaff became, if anything, more of an enigma than ever, in the light of his dwelling. She recollected that Cariboo Meadows had regarded him askance, and wondered why.

He came in while her gaze was still roving from one object to another, and threw his wet outer clothing, boy fashion, on the nearest chair.

"Well," he said, "we're here."

"Please don't forget, Mr. Wagstaff," she replied coldly, "that I would much prefer not to be here."

He stood a moment regarding her with his odd smile. Then he went into the adjoining room. Out of this he presently emerged, dragging a small steamer trunk. He opened it, got down on his knees, and pawed over the contents. Hazel, looking over her shoulder, saw that the trunk was filled with woman's garments, and sat amazed.

"Say, little person," Bill finally remarked, "it looks to me as if you could outfit yourself completely right here."

"I don't know that I care to deck myself in another woman's finery, thank you," she returned perversely.

"Now, see here," Roaring Bill turned reproachfully; "see here—"

He grinned to himself then, and went again into the other room, returning with a small, square mirror. He planted himself squarely in front of her, and held up the glass. Hazel took one look at her reflection, and she could have struck Roaring Bill for his audacity. She had not realized what an altogether disreputable appearance a normally good-looking young woman could acquire in two weeks on the trail, with no toilet accessories and only the clothes on her back. She tried to snatch the mirror from him, but Bill eluded her reach, and laid the glass on the table.

"You'll feel a whole lot better able to cope with the situation," he told her smilingly, "when you get some decent clothes on and your hair fixed. That's a woman. And you don't need to feel squeamish about these things. This trunk's got a history, let me tell you. A bunch of simon-pure tentfeet strayed into the mountains west of here a couple of summers ago. There were two women in the bunch. The youngest one, who was about your age and size, must have had more than her share of vanity. I guess she figured on charming the bear and the moose, or the simple aborigines who dwell in this neck of the woods. Anyhow, she had all kinds of unnecessary fixings along, that trunkful of stuff in the lot. You can imagine what a nice time their guides had packing that on a horse, eh? They got into a deuce of a pickle finally, and had to abandon a lot of their stuff, among other things the steamer trunk. I lent them a hand, and they told me to help myself to the stuff. So I did after they were out

of the country. That's how you come to have a wardrobe all ready to your hand. Now, you'd be awful foolish to act like a mean and stiff-necked female person. You're not going to, are you?" he wheedled. "Because I want to make you comfortable. What's the use of getting on your dignity over a little thing like clothes?"

"I don't intend to," Hazel suddenly changed front. "I'll make myself as comfortable as I can—particularly if it will put you to any trouble."

"You're bound to scrap, eh?" he grinned. "But it takes two to build a fight, and I positively refuse to fight with you."

He dragged the trunk back into the room, and came out carrying a great armful of masculine belongings. Two such trips he made, piling all his things onto a chair.

"There!" he said at last. "That end of the house belongs to you, little person. Now, get those wet things off before you catch a cold. Oh, wait a minute!"

He disappeared into the kitchen end of the house, and came back with a wash-basin and a pail of water.

"Your room is now ready, madam, an' it please you." He bowed with mock dignity, and went back into the kitchen.

Hazel heard him rattling pots and dishes, whistling cheerfully the while. She closed the door, and busied herself with an inventory of the tenderfoot lady's trunk. In it she found everything needful for complete change, and a variety of garments to boot. Folded in the bottom of the trunk was a gray cloth skirt and a short blue silk kimono. There was a coat and skirt, too, of brown corduroy. But the feminine instinct asserted itself, and she laid out the gray skirt and the kimono.

For a dresser Roaring Bill had fashioned a wide shelf, and on it she found a toilet set complete—hand mirror, military brushes, and sundry articles, backed with silver and engraved with his initials. Perhaps with a spice of malice, she put on a few extra touches. There would be some small satisfaction in tantalizing Bill Wagstaff—even if she could not help feeling that it might be a dangerous game. And, thus arrayed in the weapons of her sex, she slipped on the kimono, and went into the living room to the cheerful glow of the fire.

Bill remained busy in the kitchen. Dusk fell. The gleam of a light showed through a crack in the door. In the big room only the fire gave battle to



Hazel Saw That the Trunk Was Filled With Woman's Garments.

the shadows, throwing a ruddy glow into the far corners. Presently Bill came in with a pair of candles which he set on the mantel above the fireplace.

"By Jove!" he said, looking down at her. "You look good enough to eat! I'm not a cannibal, however," he continued hastily, when Hazel flushed. She was not used to such plain speaking. "And supper's ready. Come on!"

The table was set. Moreover, to her surprise, and yet not so greatly to her surprise, for she was beginning to expect almost anything from this paradoxical young man—it was spread with linen, and the cutlery was silver, the dishes china, in contradistinction to the tawdry of his camp outfit.

As a cook Roaring Bill Wagstaff had no cause to be ashamed of himself, and Hazel enjoyed the meal, particularly since she had eaten nothing since six in the morning. After a time, when her appetite was partially satisfied, she took to glancing over his kitchen. There seemed to be some adjunct of a kitchen missing. A fire burned on a hearth similar to the one in the living room. Pots stood about the edge of the fire. But there was no sign of a stove.

Bill finished eating, and resorted to cigarette material instead of his pipe. "Well, little person," he said at last, "what do you think of this joint of mine, anyway?"

"I've just been wondering," she replied. "I don't see any stove, yet you have food here that looks as if it were baked, and biscuits that must have been cooked in an oven."

"You see no stove for the good and

sufficient reason," he returned, "that you can't pack a stove on a horse—and we're three hundred odd miles from the end of any wagon road. With a Dutch oven or two—that heavy, round iron thing you see there—I can guarantee to cook almost anything you can cook on a stove. Anybody can if they know how. Besides, I like things better this way. If I didn't, I suppose I'd have a stove—and maybe a hot-water supply, and modern plumbing. As it is, it affords me a sort of prideful satisfaction, which you may or may not be able to understand, that this cabin and everything in it is the work of my hands—or stuff I've packed in here with all sorts of effort from the outside. Maybe I'm a freak. But I'm proud of this place. Barring the inevitable loneliness that comes now and then, I can be happier here than any place I've ever struck yet. This country grows on one."

"Yes—on one's nerves," Hazel retorted.

Bill smiled, and, rising, began to clear away the dishes. Hazel resisted an impulse to help. She would not work; she would not lift her finger to any task, she reminded herself. He had put her in her present position, and he could wait on her. So she rested an elbow on the table and watched him. In the midst of his work he stopped suddenly.

"There's oceans of time to do this," he observed. "I'm just a wee bit tired, if anybody should ask you. Let's camp in the other room. It's a heap more comfy."

He put more wood on the kitchen fire, and set a pot of water to heat. Out in the living room Hazel drew her chair to one side of the hearth. Bill sprawled on the bearskin robe with another cigarette in his fingers.

"No," he began, after a long silence, "this country doesn't get on one's nerves—not if one is a normal human being. You'll find that. When I first came up here I thought so, too; it seemed so big and empty and forbidding. But the more I see of it the better it compares with the outer world, where the extremes of luxury and want are always in evidence. It began to seem like home to me when I first looked down into this little basin. I had a partner then. I said to him: 'Here's a dandy, fine place to winter. So we wintered—in a log shack sixteen foot square that Silk and Satin and Nigger have for a stable now. When summer came my partner wanted to move on, so I stayed—stayed and began to build for the next winter. And I've been working at it ever since, making little things like chairs and tables and shelves, and fixing up game heads whenever I got an extra good one. And maybe two or three times a year I'd go out. Got restless, you know. I'm not really a hermit by nature. Lord, the things I've packed in here from the outside! Books—I hired a whole pack train at Ashcroft once to bring in just books; they thought I was crazy, I guess. I've quit this place once or twice, but I always come back. It's got that home feeling that I can't find anywhere else. Only it has always lacked one important home qualification," he finished softly. "Do you ever build air castles?"

"No," Hazel answered untruthfully, uneasy at the trend of his talk. She was learning that Bill Wagstaff, for all his gentleness and patience with her, was a persistent mortal.

"Well, I do," he continued, unperturbed. "Lots of 'em. But mostly around one thing—a woman—a dream woman—because I never saw one that seemed to fit in until I ran across you."

"Mr. Wagstaff," Hazel pleaded, "won't you please stop talking like that? It isn't—it isn't—"

"Isn't proper, I suppose," Bill supplied dryly. "Now, that's merely an error, and a fundamental error on your part, little person. Our emotion and instincts are perfectly proper when you get down to fundamentals. You've got an artificial standard to judge by, that's all. And I don't suppose you have the least idea how many lives are spoiled one way and another by the operation of those same artificial standards in this little old world. Now, I may seem to you a lawless, unprincipled individual indeed, because I've acted contrary to your idea of the accepted order of things. But here's my side of it: I'm in search of happiness. We all are. I have a few ideals—and very few illusions. I don't quite believe in this thing called love at first sight. That presupposes a volatility of emotion that people of any strength of character are not likely to indulge in. But—for instance, a man can have a very definite ideal of the kind of woman he would like for a mate, the kind of woman he could be happy with and could make happy. And whenever he finds a woman who corresponds to that ideal he's apt to make a strenuous attempt to get her. That's pretty much how I felt about you."

"You had no right to kidnap me," Hazel began.

"You had no business getting lost and making it possible for me to carry you off," Bill replied. "Isn't that logic?" "I'll never forgive you," Hazel flashed. "It was treacherous and unmanly. There are other ways of winning a woman."

"There wasn't any other way open to me," Bill grew suddenly moody. "Not with you in Cariboo Meadows. I'm taboo there. Why, I'd have been at your elbow when you left the supper table at Jim Briggs' that night if I hadn't known how it would be. I went there out of sheer curiosity to take a look at you—maybe out of a spirit of defiance, too, because I knew that I was certainly not welcome even if they were willing to take my money for a meal. And I came away all up in the air. There was something about you—the tone of your voice, the way your proud little head is set on your shoulders, your makeup in general—that sent me away with a large-sized grudge at myself, at Cariboo Meadows, and at you for coming in my way."

"Why?" she asked in wonder.

"Because you'd have believed what they told you, and Cariboo Meadows can't tell anything about me that isn't bad," he said quietly. "My record there makes me entirely unfit to associate with—that would have been your conclusion. And I wanted to be with you, to talk to you, to take you by storm and make you like me as I felt I could care for you. You can't have grown up, little person, without realizing that you do attract men very strongly. All women do, but some far more than others."

"Perhaps," she admitted coldly. "Men have annoyed me with their unwelcome attentions. But none of them ever dared go the length of carrying me away against my will. You can't explain or excuse that."

"I'm not attempting excuses," Bill made answer. "There are two things I never do—apologize or bully. I dare say that's one reason the Meadows gives me such a black eye. If they weren't a good deal afraid of me, and always laying for a chance to do me up, they wouldn't let me stay in the town overnight. So you can see what a handicap I was under when it came to making your acquaintance and courting you in the orthodox manner."

"You've made a great mistake," she said bitterly. "If you think you've removed the handicap, I've suffered a great deal at the hands of men in the past six months. I'm beginning to believe that all men are brutes at heart."

Roaring Bill sat up and clasped his hands over his knees and stared fixedly into the fire.

"No," he said slowly, "all men are not brutes—any more than all women are angels. I'll convince you of that."

"Take me home, then," she cried forlornly. "That's the only way you can convince me or make amends."

"No," Bill murmured, "that isn't the way. Wait till you know me better. Besides, I couldn't take you out now if I wanted to without exposing you to greater hardships than you'll have to endure here. Do you realize that it's fall, and we're in the high latitudes? This snow may not go off at all. Even if it does it will storm again before a week. You couldn't wallow through snow to your waist in forty-below-zero weather."

"People will pass here, and I'll get word out," Hazel asserted desperately.

"What good would that do you? You've got too much conventional regard for what you term your reputation to send word to Cariboo Meadows that you're living back here with Roaring Bill Wagstaff, and won't some one please come and rescue you." He paused to let that sink in, then continued: "Besides, you won't see a white face before spring; then only by accident. No one in the North, outside of a few Indians, has ever seen this cabin or knows where it stands."

She sat dumb, raging inwardly. For the minute she could have killed Roaring Bill. She who had been so sure in her independence carried, whether or no, into the heart of the wilderness at the whim of a man who stood a self-confessed rowdy, in ill repute among his own kind, there was a slumbering devil in Miss Hazel Weir, and it took little to wake her temper. She looked at Bill Wagstaff, and her breast heaved. He was responsible, and he could sit coolly talking about it. The resentment that had smoldered against Andrew Bush and Jack Barrow concentrated on Roaring Bill as the arch offender of them all. And lest she yield to a savage impulse to scream at him, she got up and ran into the bedroom, slammed the door shut behind her, and threw herself across the bed to muffle the sound of her crying in a pillow.

After a time she lifted her head. Outside, the wind whistled gustily around the cabin corners. In the hushed intervals she heard a steady pad, pad, sounding sometimes close by her door, again faintly at the far end of the room. A beam of light shone through the generous latchstring hole in the door. Stealing softly over, she peeped through this hole. From end to end of the big room and back again Roaring Bill paced slowly, looking straight ahead of him with a fixed, absent stare, his teeth closed on his nether lip. Hazel blinked wondering. Many an hour in the last three months she had walked the floor like that, biting her lip in mental agony. And then, while she was looking, Bill abruptly extinguished the candles. In the red gleam from the hearth she saw him go into the kitchen, closing the door softly. After that there was no sound but the swirl of the storm blowing at her window.

In line with Roaring Bill's forecast, the weather cleared for a brief span, and then winter shut down in earnest. Daily the cold increased, till a half-inch layer of frost stood on the cabin panes.

How Hazel passes the winter in the "wilds" and what happens when spring brings a chance for her release, is told in the next installment.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Pithy News Items

Gathered From All Over New Mexico

Western Newspaper Union News Service.

COMING EVENTS.

July 4-6—Cowboys' Reunion at Las Vegas.
Aug. 7-11—Round-up and Sports Carnival at Magdalena.
October—Annual meeting New Mexico Public Health Association.

Albuquerque will have a new park called the Rio Grande.

Oil indications about Aztec are looking more favorable as drilling progresses.

Don Tiburcio Lopez of Las Cruces was instantly killed when he was struck by lightning.

Wool shipments from San Juan county total 600,000 pounds, and some wool is still stored.

A deposit of coal, lying 130 feet below the surface, has been found by a well driller near Portales.

The Hondo-Mogollon state highway will connect Magdalena with the rich gold mining camp at Mogollon.

An important discovery of molybdenum has been made near the Colorado-New Mexico line south of La Jara.

Under the call for 230,000 men to mobilize between July 22 and 25, New Mexico will send 740 draft registrants to Camp Travis, Tex.

To add to the safety of New Mexico's securities, a new burglar and fire proof safe was placed in the office of the state treasurer at the capitol.

A number of Clovis people have filed claims on the salt lake south-west of Portales which it is thought contains a heavy deposit of potash.

Seven out of ten first prizes in the Bird Puzzle Contest conducted by the Albuquerque Game Protective Association were won by Pueblo and Navaho Indians.

Governor Lindsay granted a twenty-one day reprieve for J. O. Starr of Las Cruces, sentenced to hang July 5 for the murder of Sheriff Dwight Stephens of Luna county.

Fred LeClerc of Aztec died in a Durango, Colo., hospital of a blood clot on the brain, which is supposed to have resulted from an injury inflicted by a mad bull.

Mrs. Elsie Marley, formerly Miss Elsie Hungerford of Gallup, was acquitted of murder after the jury was out over eight hours. Mrs. Marley was tried for the alleged murder of Harvey Powell.

After being out all night at Las Vegas, the jury returned a verdict of not guilty in the case of the State vs. Jose Munoz, who was tried for the murder of Juan Ballejo on June 9 at Campana.

The cotton crop on 8,000 acres under the Carlsbad project is said to be 15 per cent in advance of what it was at this time last year. Cotton, alfalfa and wheat promise prosperity for Carlsbad this year.

San Miguel county is fast coming to the front as one of the big school centers of the state. The county now has ninety school buildings which accommodate over 7,000 pupils, requiring the services of 117 teachers.

Ninety-one years old and still a cowpuncher. That is the distinction which entitled Matt Crosby, a resident of Ocate, to be a guest of honor at the Fourth Annual Cowboys' Reunion at East Las Vegas, July 3, 4 and 5.

After a short preliminary hearing before Judge W. W. McClellan, Dr. Franklin J. Patchin, charged with involuntary manslaughter as the result of the death of a 16-year-old girl at Albuquerque, was bound over to await the action of the grand jury.

There is plenty of fish—in the Rio Arriba country. So Game and Fish Warden Theodore Rouault, Jr., discovered on a recent trip to that county with a party of friends. He flashed in the Brazos and Chama rivers and in various creeks and reports that fish eight to fifteen inches in size are plentiful.

Seven young ladies carried the banners of the five allied nations fighting Germany and the Red Cross and Pythian emblems at the Scottish Rite cathedral at Albuquerque on the occasion of a patriotic meeting held by Santa Fe lodge No. 2, Knights of Pythias, the cathedral being used by courtesy of the Masonic fraternity.

Roselle O'Neal, otherwise known as "Billy, the Brown Skin Girl," pleaded guilty to violation of section 13 before United States District Judge Neblett at Santa Fe. This section forbids having immoral relations within five miles of an army camp. It was alleged she was living with an army captain at Columbus, and it is reported the officer has been relieved of his command. Judge Neblett fined Roselle O'Neal \$100 and costs, which she paid.

The Tularosa Community Ditch Company is considering the building of a concrete dam across the river at Tularosa, at an estimated cost of \$2,500.

There are 446 prisoners on the register of the New Mexico penitentiary and of this number there are 347 in the pen, and 99 outside doing road work.

Fire destroyed the Hotel Bates at Carlsbad, causing a loss estimated at \$75,000. A part of the furniture was saved. Three men were overcome by smoke, but were rescued.